

Lisa -  
for your records.... Mark T.

References: Mill Creek pgs 1, 3, 8, 11, 17  
Robert Shortess (1840's) pg 8  
John Moreland (1849) pg 8

A CULTURAL RESOURCES INVENTORY  
OF CERTAIN LANDS IN THE ASTORIA AREA  
THAT WERE FORMERLY A PART OF THE  
TONGUE POINT NAVAL AIR STATION

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## ABSTRACT

Cultural resources field survey work was undertaken by the author between 17 and 19 October 1981 on a portion of the former Tongue Point Naval Base under contract with the Oregon Division of State Lands. The investigations consisted of a pedestrian examination of the exposed ground surface within the study area and a review of the pertinent archaeological, ethnographic and historical literature. Cultural resources observed in the field and identified through the literature search consisted of buildings and structures comprising a part of the Tongue Point Naval Base, built in the late 1930's and 1940's. A single aboriginal archaeological site is officially recorded within the study area near the mouth of Mill Creek; but it probably was destroyed during construction of the Tongue Point Naval Base. No cultural materials were observed in the vicinity of this site, even at low tide. It must be noted, however, that it is possible for a limited field investigation to reveal no sign of an archaeological site which is buried by recent sediment or hidden by the sort of dense vegetation which covers much of the study area. Such a site could well be located only when ground-disturbing operations are underway. Should this be the case, work in the immediate vicinity should cease and the State Historic Preservation Office in Salem be notified. Recommendations for managing the cultural resources in the study area are provided in the final section of this report. Copies of this report are on file with the Oregon Division of State Lands and the State Historic Preservation Office, both located in Salem, Oregon.

## FIELD METHODS AND OBSERVATIONS

The former Tongue Point Naval Base is a low, marshy area on the Oregon side of the Columbia River, stretching along the southwest side of Cathlamet Bay from the isthmus of Tongue Point upriver almost two miles to the mouth of the John Day River (Fig. 1). The Tongue Point Naval Base appears on the Astoria, Oregon-Washington and the Cathlamet Bay, Oregon Quadrangles of the 7.5 minute series of U. S. G. S. topographic maps, both dated 1949. The study area falls within Sections 2, 11, 12 and 13, T8NR9W, Willamette Meridian. The coordinates are approximately Latitude 46°11'30" North; Longitude 123°45' West. The southwest boundary of the study area is formed by the Spokane, Portland and Seattle Railway line which hugs the base of the hillsides and, in places, is built on landfill. Indeed a large portion of the study area is made up of landfill, presumably dredge spoils from the creation of Mott Basin, the harbor area of the Tongue Point Naval Base.

The vegetation is quite dense over the undeveloped portion of the study area (Fig. 1). Saplings of alder, blackberry vines an inch thick, ferns, reeds and marsh grasses all abound, obscuring the ground surface and creating a nearly impenetrable thicket. Field observation in the undeveloped area consisted of several pedestrian transects beginning at the Corps of Engineers Field Station (Fig. 1), and proceeding along rough compass bearings to the water's edge or the study area boundary. Small test holes were excavated with a trowel into the sandy soil at several points along each transect. These holes were dug only to a depth of about one foot, then



ckfilled. No stratigraphy or cultural materials were revealed in these test holes. Observations near the water's edge at low tide revealed no cultural material.

The area around the mouth of Mill Creek (Fig. 1) was examined as thoroughly as the dense ground cover and tidal flat mud would permit. This is the area of aboriginal archaeological site 35CLT54 as recorded in the Oregon Archaeological Survey files at the State Historic Preservation Office in Salem. The site was recorded in 1977 by Rick Minor on the basis of an earlier listing by George Phebus. No cultural material was observed either by Minor in 1977 or during the present investigation. The likelihood is that the site was destroyed either by railroad construction in the 1890's or by landfill and construction of the Tongue Point Naval Base in the 1940's.

Quite close to the location of 35CLT54 are the remains of Chessman Field, a baseball field built as a part of the Tongue Point Naval Base after World War II. Chessman Field was named for Merle R. Chessman, editor of the Astoria Evening Budget from 1918 to 1947. Chessman was instrumental in securing a naval facility at Tongue Point in 1939 (Miller 1958:92). The athletic field is reported to have included a grandstand and dressing rooms (U. S. Navy 1947). Today it is simply an overgrown field with quantities of dumped trash.

The portion of the study area occupied by the former hangars and runway of the Tongue Point Naval Air Station was examined on foot. None of the buildings was entered. There are two large hangars, architecturally undistinguished but substantially built of concrete and steel, which lie within

the study area. There also are several smaller structures of wood frame and steel quonset hut construction. The concrete runway is used as a log storage area and there are log booms tied to each of the long piers which jut out into Mott Basin.

A map in the 19 May 1956 Armed Forces Day brochure (Astoria Public Library Vertical File: "U. S. Navy - Tongue Point") labels the two large hangars within the study area as "Hangars # 2 and # 3." The piers within the study area are piers #1 - # 5. The various smaller buildings are labeled as to their function at that time and Chessman Field is marked.

To the Indians of the Lower Columbia River, Tongue Point was known as "Soo-kum-its-e-ah," (Ruby and Brown 1976:6) and was a place for catching sturgeon (p. 160) and portaging across the narrowest part to avoid the rough seas in the unprotected river mouth (Thwaites 1905:253-54). Tongue Point also was a divider between the Clatsop who occupied the Oregon side of the Columbia River mouth and their cousins the Cathlamet who lived along the Oregon side of the river upstream from Tongue Point (Ray 1938:37). The point also was said to divide the salt water rolling in from the Pacific from the fresh water of the river itself (Thwaites 1905:253-54).

We do not know for how many thousands of years the mouth of the Columbia River was occupied by the Native Americans. There has been little archaeological research in the area, and those who have searched for archaeological sites have remarked that few remain due to the ravages of erosion and human destruction. Phebus and Drucker (1973:1) comment that

the severe climatic conditions of the lower Columbia River areas, such as the annual freshets and topographic alterations caused by railroads, logging and commercial fishing all have been contributing factors in reducing the archaeological potential of the area. What remains today in many cases is simply the lithic residue of village middens, often inaccessible except at low tide.

Rick Minor (1979:4) echoes this lament and states that of the fifty-two known aboriginal sites near the mouth of the Columbia, only thirteen have survived to be examined by archaeologists and all of these have been adversely impacted

to some extent by natural and/or human destructive forces. Minor goes on to point out that the general rise in sea level since the last Pleistocene glacial advance has inundated any archaeological remains earlier than about 5000 years ago along the main channel of the Columbia River (Minor 1979:5). That people occupied the lower Columbia region earlier than 5000 years ago is probable (Pettigrew 1979:5). Artifacts typologically similar to ones dated elsewhere in the Pacific Northwest between 8000 and 10,000 years ago have been found on an upper terrace of the Youngs River near Astoria (Minor 1979:5). It will take a great deal of further field research to work out the chronology of human occupation on the Lower Columbia. There are many unanswered questions.

We know much more about the Native Americans who lived in the area of Tongue Point about 200 years ago. These were the people seen, visited and described by Lewis and Clark and the other early European and American explorers and traders. Fishing was the mainstay of the riverine lifestyle on the lower Columbia, but hunting and gathering played important roles as well (Hewes 1947; Ray 1938 and Ruby and Brown 1976). The Clatsop and Cathlamet occupied the south shore of the Columbia during the late spring to fall season when the anadromous fish were running (Minor 1979:3). They lived in camps near the best fishing spots. During the winter, they congregated in large villages made up of plank houses up to thirty meters long and twelve meters wide (Beckham 1977:59). Beckham mentions both elk and waterfowl hunting as important food sources and notes a long list of plants that were gathered,



mostly by women, for food, clothing and baskets (Beckham 1977:70-71). Among the plants he lists are several that occur in the low, marshy environment characterizing much of the study area (Franklin and Dyrness 1973:295-96).

Fishing was done with weirs, nets and hooks (Beckham 1977:68-69). Great quantities of fish were dried and smoked. Processed salmon was traded up the Columbia River and into the Willamette and Tualatin valleys in exchange for such goods as obsidian, furs and camas (p. 37).

The Native Americans of the Lower Columbia River signed a treaty with the United States government representative, Anson Dart, in 1851. Congress never ratified this treaty and the Indians of this region were forgotten until early in this century. In 1912 the few surviving Cathlamet were finally given \$7000 in payment for their lands (minus attorneys' fees). The Lower Chinook, Clatsop and Tillamook also were given paltry sums for their ancestral homelands (Beckham 1977:180).

In the late 1700's, the Native Americans of the Lower Columbia first had extensive contact with Europeans and Americans. One of the first was British Naval Lieutenant William Broughton. He sailed up the Columbia River in 1792, mapping and naming topographical features along the way. It was Broughton who gave Tongue Point its present name (Carey 1935:97).

Lewis and Clark came a few years later and spent several wet, windy, miserable days and nights camped on Tongue Point; "a very remarkable knob of land projecting a mile and a half into the river and only 50 yards wide in its narrowest part"(p. 136).

The explorers called the place "Point William" in honor of Captain Clark, but the name did not stick and Broughton's descriptive title has never been supplanted.

The shoreline just upriver from Tongue Point seems not to have figured prominently in anyone's assessment of the area. William Clark tried unsuccessfully to hunt elk on the marshy islands in Cathlamet Bay and described the whole shoreline as thickly forested and swampy (Thwaites 1905:262). The undeveloped part of the study area has changed but little to this day.

During the 1840's, Robert Shortess, an American settler, laid claim to a large tract of land stretching some two miles along the shoreline including Tongue Point and extending a half mile south from the Columbia River. Shortess based his claim upon the Organic Act of Oregon's Provisional Government and upon the ancestral rights of his Indian wife (Ruby and Brown 1976:213).

With American occupation of the Tongue Point area came industrial development; at least in its frontier mode. There is brief mention of a mill being built in 1849 by John Moreland "just above Tongue Point" (Miller 1958:215). It is possible that the present Mill Creek derives its name from this early mill. If so, it seems likely that the remnants of the mill would have been destroyed either by the railroad or the highway. In any event, the probable site of any mill on Mill Creek would be outside the study area (Fig. 1).

Talk of a rail link between Astoria and Portland began as early as 1853, but the link was not completed until 1898,

nearly a half century later (Miller 1958:159). Such is the power of the topographical obstacles along the banks of the Lower Columbia and the cost-effectiveness of water-borne transportation of goods.

The first military use of Tongue Point came during the War of 1812 when the Northwest Company began building a fort on this "Gibraltar of the Pacific Northwest" (Ruby and Brown 1976:154). The effort was soon abandoned and Tongue Point retained its wild, windswept character. Lieutenant Neil Howison listed Tongue Point as a good place for the United States government to reserve for defense purposes in his 1846 inventory of such places along the Columbia River (Howison 1913:54). This was not done and the area remained in private ownership. The idea of a naval facility at Tongue Point was revived around 1900 and, between 1917 and 1919, the people of Astoria, in a fit of patriotic fervor, acquired the land and gave it to the Federal government for use as a naval base. Congress appropriated money for dredging and in 1921 built four wooden piers for submarines and destroyers in the cove on the east side of Tongue Point. Work was stopped, however, in 1923 and the base was seldom used (Barber 1961). "For years the local inhabitants recalled the four finger piers and the harbor area as part of the scenery of the popular public picnic grounds rather than a naval base" (U. S. Navy 1959:1).

War clouds soon gathered again and, in 1939, extensive landfill operations were undertaken to build an amphibious seaplane base at Tongue Point. Three of the four old wooden piers were torn out and seaplane ramps were built. The

Tongue Point Naval Air Station was dedicated 31 August 1939, just as Hitler's armies were invading Poland on the other side of the globe (U. S. Navy 1959:1). The concrete and steel hangars which still exist on the site were built in 1939 along with the seaplane ramps and runway. The Daily Astorian noted on 5 January 1961 that the "Tongue Point houses and service buildings are far beyond the quality of temporary war type construction and were built at a cost of more than \$40 million dollars." In its heyday, over 3000 naval officers and enlisted personnel lived and worked at Tongue Point (Barber 1961).

At the end of World War II, the Naval Air Station was converted to serve as a base for 450 reserve amphibious naval vessels (part of the mothball fleet) (Daily Astorian 5 January 1961). The present concrete piers were built at that time (U. S. Navy 1959:2) and the harbor was dredged more extensively and renamed Mott Basin after Oregon Congressman James R. Mott (U. S. Navy 1946). The mothball fleet remained at Tongue Point until 1962 when the Tongue Point Naval Base was officially closed (Blanchard 1977:405 - 3).

In 1965, the most recent chapter in the history of the Tongue Point area began with the opening of the Tongue Point Job Corps Center on a portion of the former Naval Base (Astoria Public Library Vertical File: "Tongue Point-Job Corps"). The Job Corps Center still is in operation after numerous changes in administration and physical plant. A portion of the former Naval Base within the study area is now used as a staging area for shipping logs.



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MANAGING CULTURAL RESOURCES

Recommendations for managing the cultural resources within the study area may be divided into three parts.

- 1) The area around the mouth of Mill Creek should be regarded as archaeologically sensitive. Portions of site 35CLT54 may remain beneath twentieth century landfill in spite of construction activity associated with the railroad and the Naval Base. If further ground-disturbing activity is proposed for this area, it is recommended that test excavation be carried out by a professional archaeologist to determine if any of 35CLT54 remains.
- 2) The remaining undeveloped portions of the study area are not believed to harbor significant cultural resources. However, it is possible for a limited field investigation to reveal no sign of an archaeological site which is buried by recent sediment or hidden by the sort of dense vegetation which covers so much of the study area. Such a site could well be located only when ground-disturbing operations are underway. Should this be the case, work in the immediate vicinity should cease and the State Historic Preservation Office in Salem be notified.
- 3) The buildings and structures left from the Tongue Point Naval Air Station are significant cultural resources for the Astoria area. They are architecturally undistinguished, but are the only tangible remains of an important part of the history of the study area. If future plans call for the removal or alteration of these buildings and structures, the

State Historic Preservation Office should be notified well in advance of such actions. It is recommended that architectural photo-documentation be undertaken prior to the demolition or alteration of any of these buildings and structures; especially the two large concrete and steel hangars.

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# FIELD PHOTOGRAPH LOG

15

Black and white negatives and prints are on file with copies of this report at the Oregon Division of State Lands in Salem, Oregon.

Field Photo #	Field Photo Description
1	View Northwest of the tidal flats from the Corps of Engineers Field Station pier. Buildings of the former Tongue Point Naval Air Station appear in the background.
2	View North from the Southwest corner of the study area on the railroad track toward the tidal marsh and dense thicket (No print exists of this shot.)
3	View NNE from SW corner of the study area (Forms a panorama with photograph #2). Lois Island is in the background.
4	View NNE across the study area from a point on the railroad tracks 200 meters east of Mill Creek. Piers and buildings of the former Tongue Point Naval Air Station are in the background.
5	View ESE from the extended third base line of Chessman Field toward the Corps of Engineers Field Office and the tidal marsh. (No print exists of this shot.)
6	View ENE from same spot as photo #5 along the first pier looking toward Mott Basin.
7	View from the end of the westernmost pier in the study area toward the Corps of Engineer Field Office
8	View from same spot as photo #7 toward the tip of Tongue Point.
9	Same as photo #8 but different exposure.
10	Hangar of former Tongue Point Naval Air Station

## Field Photo #

## Field Photo Description

- |    |                                                                                 |
|----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 11 | Hangar of former Tongue Point Naval Air Station.                                |
| 12 | Hangar of former Tongue Point Naval Air Station                                 |
| 13 | Wood frame building and quonset hut from former Tongue Point Naval Air Station. |
| 14 | Small frame building from former Tongue Point Naval Air Station.                |
| 15 | Large frame building from former Tongue Point Naval Air Station.                |
| 16 | 35CLT54 from middle of railroad bridge.                                         |
| 17 | 35CLT54 from east end of railroad bridge.                                       |

